



NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY
MANA TOHU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA

QUALIFY FOR THE FUTURE WORLD
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Recognising learning for credit: Guidelines for the recognition and award of credit for learning

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1. Introduction

These guidelines have been created for tertiary education organisations (TEOs) to develop and implement regulations, policies and processes that assist learners to have their relevant learning recognised and credited.

As the future of work changes with the impact of digital and other technologies, individuals will need to up-skill and re-skill throughout their lives to maintain their currency in the workforce.

This concept of lifelong learning requires the education system to shift “*from knowledge-conveying instruction to learning for personal development and from the acquisition of special skills to broader discovery and the releasing and harnessing of creative potential. This shift is needed at all levels of education and types of provision...*” (UNESCO Education Strategy, 2014 – 2021)

As a result, there will be an increasing focus on the recognition of formal, informal, non-formal, experiential and workplace learning that will enable people throughout their lives, and no matter how they have learned, to have their knowledge, skills and attributes recognised, credited and credentialed.

The effective recognition of learning for the award of credit assists learners to move readily between education organisations, and progress in work and education without having to repeat learning or experiences.

1.1 Two approaches for the recognition of learning

There are many ways to describe how learning can be recognised, credited and credentialed. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) uses *credit recognition and transfer* and *recognition of prior learning*, and recommends the use of these terms. While this document describes these processes by two separate terms, they are not always distinct from each other but are two ways of recognising learning for the award of credit.

NZQA describes credit recognition and transfer (CRT) as a process where credit for outcomes already achieved by a student through formal study in relation to a qualification is recognised as credit for comparable outcomes in another qualification.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process that involves formal assessment of a learner’s relevant and current knowledge and skills (gained through prior learning) to determine achievement of learning outcomes of a qualification for the purpose of awarding credit towards that qualification.

RPL leads to credit being awarded for existing skills, knowledge, and attributes acquired without regard for the length, place or method of learning (e.g. workplace, life experience, hobbies, self-directed study).

2. CRT and RPL: TEOs’ responsibilities

Tertiary education organisations (TEOs) have a range of opportunities to support, promote and engage with learners on CRT and RPL through their overall systems and regulations; and the information, advice, and support they provide.

Learners can face financial and opportunity costs where their existing relevant learning is not recognised or credited. TEOs are expected to be proactive about engaging with learners at

the point of application and enrolment to determine whether they are likely to have existing learning that can be recognised for credit¹.

TEOs seeking programme approval are required to have clear, relevant, and appropriate regulations that specify requirements for CRT and RPL (*Rule 4, Criterion 5 of the NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2021*).

Key features of effective CRT and RPL policies and practices place the learner at the centre and focus on the learning they have obtained. TEOs should balance the opportunities for learners to progress without repeating learning with maintaining confidence in the integrity of qualifications.

TEOs should:

- integrate CRT and RPL into their overall systems, regulations, policies and practice, e.g. programme development, assessment and moderation, organisational self-assessment
- approve appropriate quality assurance and academic regulations, policies and procedures for CRT and RPL that apply across all learning areas of the organisation
- promote to learners, through all relevant means, information about CRT and RPL
- provide accessible academic advice and support to assist learners to apply for credit through CRT and RPL
- ensure decisions about CRT and RPL are timely, transparent, robust, consistent, and defensible and for the maximum benefit of learners.

¹ TEOs should also note the Tertiary Education Commission's condition 5.9 on Student Achievement Component funding, which prohibits TEOs from seeking SAC3+ funding for recognised prior learning credited to a student.

3. Recognising learning and awarding credit

To be awarded a qualification listed on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF), a learner needs to achieve the learning outcomes of a programme that enables them to meet the graduate profile of the qualification. Outcomes are described in terms of knowledge, skills and attributes, and the application of those, or what the learner can “do, be and know”.

Programmes are made up of components of learning and/or assessment standards which specify the learning outcomes that together build towards achievement of the graduate profile. Some examples of components are individual courses, modules, papers or projects that a learner undertakes to complete a programme.

Recognising learning and awarding credit is undertaken by evaluating learners’ skills and knowledge in relation to the graduate profile or other learning outcomes of a programme, component of learning, or assessment standard.

3.1 Information for learners

Key information regarding CRT and RPL policies and process should be made readily available for learners on the TEO website, and in recruitment, application, and enrolment material.

This information should assist learners to understand that their relevant skills and knowledge could be recognised and awarded appropriate credits for outcomes achieved (including qualifications where appropriate).

While learners may request CRT and/or RPL at any stage of their study, it is recommended that TEOs focus their engagement with learners about CRT and RPL during the application and enrolment process.

This will better enable TEOs to determine the most suitable programme of study for a learner, provide sufficient time to undertake a rigorous CRT or RPL process, and advise the learner about any impact on eligibility for student loans and allowances.

Information on applying for credit through CRT and RPL includes:

- clear description of how credit can be awarded
- an outline of the organisation’s processes
- indicative timeframes to complete the application and assessment
- fee structure
- an outline of the documentation, evidence and assessment requirements
- an outline of how credit awarded through CRT/RPL may be integrated into the learners programme (while understanding that awarding credit is a separate process from entry into a specific programme).

3.2 Preparing for assessment

It is expected TEOs will provide academic and administrative advice and guidance to learners throughout the processes for recognising credit. The nature of the advice and guidance required will vary depending on the learner, the type and extent of evidence they have available and credit being sought.

The TEO’s first step should be to determine if the learner is able to obtain credit by assisting them to reflect on their previous study, other prior learning, work and life experiences.

An academic advisor and the learner work together to:

- identify suitable qualifications, programmes and/or components for which the learner may be able to be obtain credit

- understand the evidence the learner has available to them through their life, study and work experiences that would support their application
- identify gaps in their learning or experience and provide advice on how to fill the gaps
- support the learner in preparing for assessment.

The time taken to gather and build evidence for assessment varies depending on the learner and the learning outcomes or qualification for which they are seeking credit.

3.3 Assessing learning

Assessment is used to evaluate if the learner has the skills and knowledge to meet the outcome of the programme, components and assessment standards for which they are seeking credit. The assessment takes into account credit already gained, for example through previous study as well as recognition of prior learning.

The principles of good assessment practice are that assessment is fair, valid, reliable, consistent and authentic.

The assessor is normally a different person from the academic advisor, who advises the learner preparing their application.

Credit recognition and transfer

Typically, an assessor reviews the learner's verified official academic record/transcript or their New Zealand Record of Achievement to identify qualifications, programmes, components and assessment standards achieved. The assessor uses this information to determine if the outcomes achieved by the learner are equivalent either wholly, or in part, to the outcomes for which they are seeking credit.

Further information may be requested from the learner to help with the evaluation of their knowledge and skills. For example, specific details of the learning outcomes, activities and assessments of the qualifications, programmes, components and assessment standards achieved.

Geoff: a case study for CRT

Geoff comes to a TEO seeking a degree qualification in culinary arts. Geoff has recently begun his career in the industry and has achieved a Level 5 Diploma in a cooking/food preparation qualification.

The TEO:

- undertakes a preliminary evaluation of Geoff's learning and identifies that he is likely to have knowledge, skills and attributes that can contribute to the learning outcomes of the programme leading to the degree qualification
- evaluates Geoff's official academic transcript or, if applicable, his New Zealand Record of Achievement to identify and verify qualifications, components and assessment standards achieved
- uses the information provided by Geoff to determine if the outcomes he has achieved are equivalent either wholly, or in part, to the outcomes for which they are seeking credit
- requests further information from Geoff if required, such as specific details of the programmes, components and assessment standards achieved
- awards credits at the relevant levels toward the degree qualification sought by Geoff
- identifies areas where there are gaps or areas that require further learning
- works with Geoff to design the remainder of their programme, including any pre-requisites for the award of the qualification.

Recognition of prior learning

This assessment follows a process of analysing learning and gathering evidence about a learner's skills and knowledge gained through their life experiences or non-formal learning, which are then related to learning outcomes of quality assured qualifications, programmes, components and standards.

Depending on the credit sought and the nature of the learner's prior learning, the assessment(s) may include one or more of:

- challenge tests
- practical assessment
- professional conversation or interview with the assessor(s)
- presentation of and a review of the portfolio of evidence with the assessor(s).

A learner may produce a portfolio of evidence, in digital and/or physical format, that could include a wide range of evidence.

Typically, a learner's skills and knowledge gained through a wide range of experiential, workplace and other learning are evaluated by suitable assessors. Assessors may require specific training in RPL, which is a specialist skill. The RPL assessor(s) commonly engages subject matter experts and/or a panel in the assessment process.

Geoff: a case study for RPL

Geoff comes to a TEO seeking a degree qualification in culinary arts. Geoff has a long career in the industry and is a chef in charge of his own kitchen. Geoff has a trade-based cooking qualification obtained many years ago.

The TEO:

- undertakes a preliminary evaluation of Geoff's learning and identifies that he is likely to have knowledge, skills and attributes that can contribute to the learning outcomes of the programme leading to the degree qualification
- works with Geoff to self-assess his experience and to recognise his own learning. For example, through asking Geoff to consider statements and questions that prompt him to reflect on and record his experience and learning
- assists Geoff to co-discover their skills, knowledge and attributes. For example, through drawing out from Geoff knowledge he may not have known he had, such as theoretical knowledge likely to be needed to meet outcomes for credit toward higher level qualifications
- works with Geoff to identify the evidence available and the evidence that needs to be gathered for the assessment of his skills and knowledge
- assists Geoff to map what he can do and be and knows and can demonstrate against the learning outcomes of the programme
- ascertains what Geoff is missing and works with him to fill the gap(s). For example, a specific course or module may be needed to fully meet the learning outcomes of the programme leading to the qualification
- assists Geoff in preparing for assessment
- assesses Geoff's knowledge, skill and attributes against the graduate profile outcomes of the programme and determines if the qualification can be awarded
- works with Geoff to design the remainder of their programme of study (if the whole qualification cannot be credited) including any pre-requisites for the award of the qualification.

Professional body requirements

Some professional bodies may have specific requirements for graduates wishing to enter their profession. These requirements may involve learning that cannot be credited or a limit on the number of credits that can be awarded toward a particular programme leading to the professional qualification.

International students

When assessing the eligibility of international students for CRT or RPL, it is recommended for this to be done during the application stage so that an accurate determination can be made about the appropriate programme of study before the enrolment is confirmed and visa issued.

Where a CRT or RPL assessment takes place after enrolment, and results in changes to the initial programme of study, TEOs must inform Immigration New Zealand.

CRT and RPL in degrees

Section 454 of the Education and Training Act 2020 stipulates that NZQA must not consent to the granting of degree awards unless satisfied that the award recognises the completion of a programme of advanced learning that:

- (a) is taught mainly by people engaged in research; and
- (b) emphasises general principles and basic knowledge as the basis for self-directed work and learning.

This means that Te Pūkenga subsidiaries, wānanga or private training establishments must make clear in their regulations how they manage, facilitate and assess applications for CRT and RPL to meet this test.

3.4 Awarding credit

Credit arising from CRT and RPL is recorded on the learner's official academic transcript. If the credit is based on CRT, the grade achieved by the learner from their previous study should be recorded and transferred at the same value as part of the credit awarded.

In general, full or partial credit is awarded for:

- a learner's achievement of comparable outcomes
- recorded achievement, whether or not it forms part or all of a complete qualification
- achievement at the level consistent with the learner's demonstrated level of competence
- achievement that is at the same level as the credit being sought.

The TEO should ensure that learning credited through CRT or RPL is of equal standing with formal learning. This means there are no arbitrary barriers or limits on the learning that can be credited through CRT or RPL, and that any restrictions on credit are based on specific, documented and clear legal, academic or industry requirements, e.g. registration body.

3.5 Appealing decisions

Where credit is not awarded, either in total or in part, clear reasons for the decision should be recorded. TEOs should inform the learner and have processes in place for appealing the decision.

3.6 Records

Records of all applications for CRT and RPL, the resulting assessment and any appeal decisions should be kept along with other learner records.

4. Quality assurance

It is important that all TEOs protect and maintain confidence in the quality of educational delivery and assessment leading to the award of credit on the NZQF.

The TEO's systems, regulations, policies and processes for CRT and RPL should be integrated into the academic and other quality management systems.

An equivalent level of scrutiny to all other learner achievement should also be applied to decisions relating to the award of credit through CRT and RPL. This includes oversight of assessment, and internal and external moderation.

4.1 Review of CRT/RPL policies

CRT and RPL policies should undergo regular internal review as part of organisational self-assessment, to ensure they remain fit for purpose and are administered fairly, consistently and rigorously.

They should be reviewed by TEOs annually, with a major review every five years.

NZQA may review TEOs' CRT and RPL practice as part of External Evaluation and Review or programme monitoring.